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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a case study of the role of a college instructor's values on the teaching process and on his students. A white male English instructor who taught African-American literature was the focus of the study. Data were collected through classroom observations, a review of the course syllabus and handouts, and a series of recorded interviews and discussions with the instructor. A review of the data suggested that the instructor's perception of values fell into four distinct categories: teacher relates to the message, teacher relates to context, teacher relates to students, and teacher relates to self. Examples from classroom observations and interviews with the instructor are used to illustrate the role of values in these four categories of interaction. It was found that the instructor tried not to limit the meanings that literature might have to the students, saw his role more as a facilitator or coach than as a judge, recognized his role as a white instructor teaching African-American literature, valued the informed opinions of students, and used self-criticism to improve his teaching. (Contains 10 references.) (MDM)

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The Values of Teaching Literature: The Manifestation of a Teacher's Values in the African-American Literature Course

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Dave S. Knowlton

One problem that has faced educators at all levels is how to "deal with" values. Do we, as educators, have the right to impose our opinions and interpretations of reality on students? If so, to what extent? If not, how do we avoid it without depriving students of some educational value? The answers to these questions have fueled one of the major debates in education. One popular movement has been that of "values clarification." This movement "taught teachers that they should be 'value neutral' in order to avoid imposing values on students" (Delattre and Russell, 1993). There is an opposite extreme to this position which holds that observation and communication are inherently persuasive (Bazerman, 1983). As a result, values are sometimes seen as inherent in the teaching act. The ramifications of embracing this view are fairly obvious: If all communication is persuasive--and thus, value-laden--the primary question is not whether or not to teach values; instead, the question is which values to teach. This question is no less provocative than the former ones facing teachers, but it does require a different kind of inquiry to answer. We must find an organized way to talk about a teacher's perception of values so that we can systematize values inquiry in a way that will be beneficial to teachers and students.

My goal with this research project was not to design a study that would find a definitive, all-inclusive way of systematizing values, as accomplishing such a lofty goal is much bigger than a single study; instead my goal was to use an exploratory and hermeneutical framework that would be useful in starting the long dialogical process that is needed to find an organizing structure for discussing values. In short, this research is not meant to be the end, audience-centered product; instead, it is meant to be the beginning of a researcher-centered process. The general questions that will be considered in this study include the following: Can a teacher recognize his own values as having an impact on the teaching process? If so, how does he negotiate these values to benefit various stakeholders? How can values be systematically examined?

Methodology

To begin inquiring into the ways teachers address their own values in the context of curriculum and instruction, I did a case study of a college English Instructor, Joseph (not his real name). It may seem rather narrow to base a study on only one instructor, but breadth is of less importance than depth when trying to understand the experiences and views of other people (Patton, 1990). Another reason that limiting my case study to one subject is not damaging is because this research is based in both the exploratory and hermeneutical traditions. My goal was not to produce results that could be extrapolated to the whole. Instead, my goal was to interpret a specific scenario and find issues that might be salient in the field of pedagogical values. Thus, limiting my study to one professor was not damaging to my goals.

Joseph made an ideal subject for this study for several reasons. First, he had a strong teaching background. He has taught courses in film studies, theater, and English. He also has taught at several different universities. Finally, Joseph was a Caucasian who was teaching African-American Literature. This fact alone seemed interesting enough to base a case study about values on his teaching.

As I began solidifying the methods I would use for this study, I came across the perspective of Hawthorne (1992):

> Educational criticism, as a form of inquiry, does not dictate any one set of data collection and analysis. Instead, it allows the critic freedom to tailor in an idiosyncratic manner methods of data collection and analysis to the phenomenon under investigation (p. 136).

Hawthorne's view that the researcher is best qualified to determine the collection and analysis procedures to fit the context of a specific study was particularly liberating to me. I did not take Hawthorne's comment as *carte blanche* permission to develop collection and analysis procedures that were based purely on whim; I did, however, view this statement as permission to vary from the denotative orders of qualitative research theorists in an effort

to develop collection and analysis techniques that fit my needs as a researcher. Since my purpose was primarily exploratory, my collection and analysis procedures did not need to be "tightly" structured.

Data Collection

Data collection was a three step process. On two occasions, I observed Joseph's African-American Literature course. I informally reviewed his course syllabus and other handouts related to his class. Finally, I conducted a series of interviews and discussions with him.

First, I observed Joseph's English class on two different occasions. In plain terms, my goal in these observations was simply to collect information for the interviews. I was searching for aspects and events of the classes that would make a good "conversation starter" during the interviews. Using "free writing" as a note-taking technique, I took notes on the components of the class where I felt Joseph was faced with value-laden decisions. Immediately after the class sessions that I observed, I developed my notes into a more detailed story line. From these notes and the resulting story line, I developed an "Interview Guide" (Briggs, 1996).

Second, I reviewed several handouts that Joseph provided his class with, including the course syllabus. Using a hermeneutic frame of reference, I took notes from these documents that seemed related to the types of issues that arose in the class that I observed.

Third, I conducted two different interviews with Joseph. The purpose of the interviews was to provide data that added "rich" information to the issues that I identified in parts one and two of data collection. This data served the purpose of confirming or refuting the interpretations that I made while observing his class and examining his course documents. Part of these interviews were traditional in that I prompted him with topics and questions. Other parts of these interviews consisted of the two of us reviewing notes that I had taken in steps one and two of data collection. The goal here was for us to co-construct the significance of the data.

Interviews were tape recorded, and I took notes of any visual cues or audible utterances that seemed relevant in capturing the "true intent" of Joseph's meanings (Briggs, 1996). Immediately following the interviews, I supplemented interview notes with any additional information that I saw as relevant since "the most basic maxim to be followed is that the interview must be analyzed as a whole before any of its component utterances are interpreted" (Briggs, 1996, p. 104). In addition, these supplements helped build a case for validity (Wolcott, 1990).

Data Analysis

My analysis consisted of three steps. First, I used my story line from the class observations and the notes I took when I reviewed the course documents to determine what values seemed to be important to Joseph. I categorized an action by Joseph or a part of his syllabus as being related to his value structure from a Hermeneutical perspective. In plain language, if it seemed to me that there were some interesting "value-laden" issues in my notes, I took note of them and included them in my interview guide.

Second, I shared my perspectives about some of the "value-laden" issues with Joseph. Together, Joseph and I discussed my interpretations and shaped them by adding to my notes, deleting from my notes, and grouping together concepts that Joseph saw as similar. In short, Joseph and I co-constructed a more thorough set of notes based on his own biases, moral and pedagogical positions, and virtues.

The third step of analysis involved categorizing these values inductively. That is, I used inductive analysis "to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the [case] under study. . ." (Patton, 1990, p. 44). While I tried to be as objective as possible in allowing these patterns to emerge, I did bring with me the bias that communication is inherently value-laden. Once I categorized the values, I shared my perceptions with Joseph who confirmed and denied some of my observations.

Findings

From my initial observations, interviews, and documents, it seemed that Joseph's perception of values fall into four distinct categories. Each of these categories involved relationships: Teacher relates to the message, teacher relates to context, teacher relates to students, and teacher relates to self. Interestingly, these relationships are similar to ones noted in a basic model of communication (see fig. 1). In sharing this interpretation with Joseph, he agreed that the model seemed to be a good fit. In this section of the paper, I offer evidence from my observations and interviews that supports the emergence of these categories.

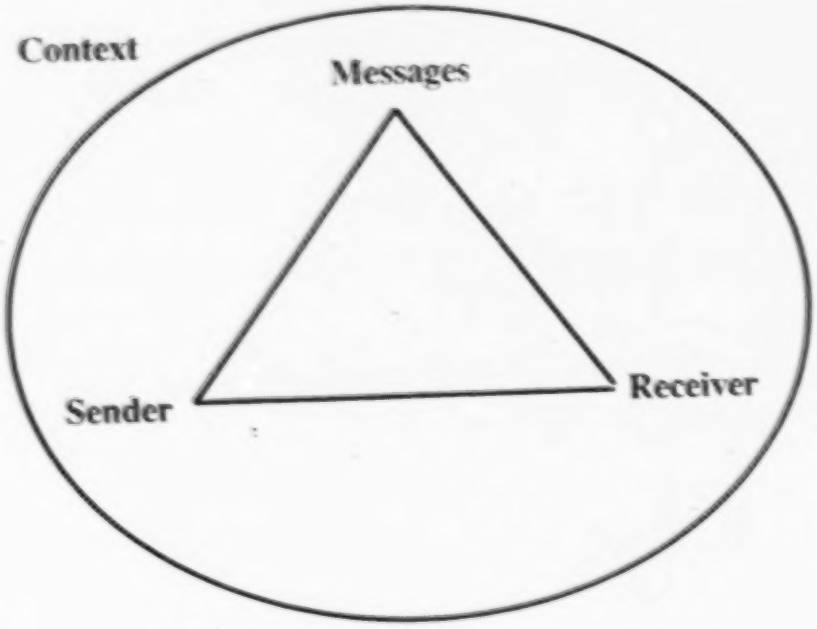

Fig. 1: This basic model of communication shows all of the elements involving the relationships of communication. What's more, each element may, in some way, impact the types of communication and the tone of that communication. (Jakobson, 1960; Lindemann, 1987)

Teacher Relates to Messages

Consider the following description from an observation of his African-American Literature course:

> The point of today's class was to discuss *Their Eyes are Watching God*. Joseph entered the text by addressing style. He asked for a student to read an extended passage toward the beginning of the book: "Angela, how about you?"
>
> "I don't have my book," Angela replied shrugging with a giggle.
>
> "Oh, Angela." Joseph turned his attention to another student. "Seccely."
>
> Seccely read the passage while others followed along. Several students were sharing books, but most were following along.
>
> "What reason would I have for starting with this passage in discussing style?"
>
> Student: There's a strong element of a female voice here.
>
> Joseph: Is it told in a woman's voice? Nina, what do you think?
>
> [Silence]
>
> Joseph: Angela?
>
> Angela: The tone is a woman's.
>
> Joseph: Well, how about issues? Are there issues that she is sensitive to that make it a woman's voice?
>
> One student answered that it summarized the main characters' childhood. Another answered that it was a metaphor for the main character's life.
>
> "What do these both show," Joseph asked.
>
> Several suggestions were bounced around from Joseph's questions. Based on one student's comments, Joseph wrote on the board: "Difference in Values of Marriage." From here, the class discussion went to how the grandmother in the book saw marriage as security, but the main character wanted romance. Slowly, this conversation left the confines of the book and went into a discussion of the practical side of love (traditionally a man's view) versus the romantic view (traditionally female).
>
> To this point in class, Joseph had spent much of his time wandering from the front of the room to the center of the room. As the conversation evolved from dealing with the book to dealing with "real world" love,

> Joseph stood at the front of the room--one hand tucked under the opposite arm to support the elbow of his other hand. Students did most of the talking as the conversation developed into a men versus women debate.
>
> After one female student--sitting in the front right corner of the room--made a comment about the romantic view of love, a male student chimed in, "If you want romance, buy a novel." Several members of the class laughed. Joseph let out a short chuckle. Mike and the female student exchanged smiles.

During my interviews with him, Joseph argued that the traditional approach to analyzing literature is an effective "entering point" for students. However, Joseph said that he tries not to limit the meanings that literature may have to students. Joseph recognized that a formalist approach to interpreting literature is not the best approach to understanding classroom messages; there are "structuring assumptions" or "social issues" that are of higher importance in the literature: "So, I've tried to be more free in saying that it's not all just these discrete categories like irony, metaphor, and simile, etc. Interwoven through it are arguments and rhetoric."

Along the same lines, Joseph also lets the arguments and rhetoric play themselves out in the classroom: "I think it's really important for me to listen in on these kinds of debates. I'll let debates go forward much longer than I would in [other classes]. . . . These messages are important in black literature."

Teacher Relates to Context

Joseph recognized values of context on the micro, meso, and macro-levels. The English Department's core syllabus for the African-American Literature class, for example, raised some value questions about the micro-context: "There were a tremendous number of writers not of color; and that struck me as unusual, not irrational, but at least a little unusual. It is important that students read white writers writing about the black experience, but 50% seemed a high percentage."

On a slightly larger scale, the meso-context of the university provided some conflicts in values. Later in this paper, I will speak of the issue of a white teacher in an

African-American literature course as a value conflict between teacher and student. However, Joseph spoke of it as a value issue in terms of context:

> And, of course, my statement to students is always that I think it's more a question of irony. In a University where African-Americans are under represented in the teaching faculty, it seems that this should be the one place where we can count on seeing a black face. I wonder if that would be true if there were more black biology teachers, black econ teachers, black marketing professors, or whatever. Then the irony might dissipate.

Finally, Joseph pointed to society at large as an impetus for value-based teaching decisions. Racism provides an example:

> If you call a white student routinely by his first name in class, but you point to a black student, are you being racist? Certainly not; that's not what was intended. But black students tend to categorize that with more overt racist acts that have been perpetrated against them. So, I see that as a pretty strong context against which I need to work.

This perceived racism in society leads Joseph to see his role "much less judgmentally" than he does in other classes that he teaches. In other words, he works more as a coach with students than just as a judge.

There is another issue in the macro-context that lead Joseph to some pedagogical decisions: "It's a moral position of mine that we have in the past two years become an unproductively confrontational culture: Enough with the CNN crossfire--the two guys standing toe-to-toe and screaming at each other." To balance this contextual trap, Joseph emphasized dialogical and cooperative activities. This was a position that was obvious in both of my observations. Joseph organized a group inquiry into the literature, and facilitated discussions where students "built" on each other's comments. Consider the following excerpt from my observation notes:

> As a transition back into large group discussion, Joseph referred back to Charles' question about the nature of literature.

Joseph: Based on what you just did in groups, how would you define literature. What is literature? Charles, what did you decide it is.

Charles: Readability; characters; setting.

Joseph: OK, so for you, it had to be readable in some way and it also had to include some of the formal elements that we studied.

Another student: I thought it was historical; but it has a message. That is why it is literature.

Joseph: OK, so there was this whole notion of theme. Jerome, when I read a little bit about what you were writing, you touched on history. What about it, Jerome? Can history be literature?

Jerome: [Looks down and fiddles with his pen.] Yeah, I think history has something to do with literature.

Joseph: Let's explore this a little further in small groups.

Joseph numbered student from one to five . . . . They noisily moved to their assigned groups. As they start settling down, Joseph instructs them to find one part of the book that meets the definition of literature. One point that is literary. Joseph also assigns a group leader based on several criteria: being late for class, expertise in literature. After assigning group leaders, he said, "Just to screw things up a little, maybe consider the pictures as literature." He shrugs and pokes out his lip while making eye contact with a student who smiled back at him.

While the groups worked, Joseph wandered from group to group to facilitate conversation. During this, he offered several approving comments to groups who are taking strong approaches to the assignment.

So, here in this excerpt, we see how Joseph by-passed the opportunity for debate in the name of facilitation, building consensus, and bringing out new approaches.

Teacher Relates to Students

On a superficial level, I saw Joseph "valuing" students simply by his interactions with them. Consider the following example which came from my field notes:

Joseph: "A lot of people really don't like the way the book ends with a death. What did you think about that?"

Student: "Could we talk about that on Friday. I haven't made it to the end. [She looks around the room.] I'm sure I'm not the only one who hasn't finished reading."

[laughter]

Joseph: "I'm sure you're not, too."

Student 2: "This happened before. Somebody told us the ending before we got there."

Joseph: [throws up his hands, grimaces, and shrugs]

[Several students laugh]

This is only one example of many where Joseph shows that he "values" students and is willing to relate to them in a genuine and open way.

On more of a substantive level, Joseph recognizes, and cites instances of, students being concerned that a person from outside the African-American Culture may not be able to teach the course. In an effort to alleviate some of these concerns, Joseph asks students for a chance to see "not only if I'm respecting them [as individuals] but to see if I respect the material and culture enough to know about it." This idea of respecting students and their culture was an important value to Joseph. This issue emerged several times during this study.

In terms of showing respect for the students, Joseph begins by articulating his respect in the course syllabus: "I am responsible for treating each of you with respect, and respecting your informed opinions. If, for some reason, I do not meet this responsibility, I would appreciate your taking a few minutes to discuss it with me." Joseph made several connections in our interview between this policy statement and the way it plays out in practice:

> I try to be careful about letting the students finish a statement before I jump in. When I get nervous about the way a class is going, I do jump in. I find myself doing it a lot in this class. I find myself contributing out of my own head at the end of presentations--out of my own positions, my own ideologies.

Not only does Joseph recognize the value of respecting students' opinions, but also he goes on to evaluate the value. "I don't think that [a personal contribution from the teacher] is appropriate. I think I should, in any class but especially this one, be more of a facilitator, more of a connector--connecting student A with student Z." Indeed, his role is best expressed through examining some of the statements he made while facilitating class.

- "Tell me if this is what you think, Donna. . . . "
- "What does somebody think about what Cindy just said. . . . "
- "Could we have one more person respond to this question. . . ."

Joseph's role of a facilitator and connector becomes more important as students develop relationships with each other. Two structuring conflicts in the African-American Literature class surround the idea of integrationalists versus segregationists and the students who align themselves politically versus those who align themselves religiously. In both cases, Joseph points to his goal of objectivity as a method of negotiating his relationship with students:

> As we get into a political to and fro, my purpose is usually to step in to regulate. I want to make sure there is enough devil's advocacy going on so there does appear to be two sides. I work very hard to jump around in and between positions. So, in the same conversation, I might devil's advocate one position, and then as the other position gets de-emphasized, I'll bring it back.

Teacher Relates to Self

The value judgments in this category include all decisions or internal struggles that a teacher must go through. Immediately, Joseph recognized some of his basic curriculum decisions as being value-laden. In recognizing this, he struggled with his own views and opinions.

This could first be seen as Joseph talked about his reading assignments: "I've always asked students to do a lot of reading, and I'm forcing myself to get along with making them do less. I have to force myself to do this. I think there is great virtue in

having students do a little reading, but doing it well." Even though Joseph recognizes keeping the reading load down as an important value, he also recognizes that it is a value that is relative: "I still have them read as much stuff as any upper division course does. There may be a fairness issue there, I don't know. But, I just think it's important to have them do a lot of reading."

Another example of an internal struggle of values had to do with the notion of determining reasons for the failure of pedagogical techniques. After discussing some techniques that had worked in the past but did not work this particular semester, Joseph offered a look at the kind of introspective value-judgments teachers sometimes make:

> I'm very frustrated this semester, and I don't know what it is: Time has a lot to do with it; the 8 o'clock meeting has something to do with it; and I seem to have adapted my approaches to the hour and a half meeting rather than the one hour meeting. I also think that I'm just getting stale. I think it is very easy when you are teaching this course to play "the man who freed the slaves" and get very smug and self-satisfied about it. I think that has happened to me, so I need to work against that.

Problems With The Study

As with any exploratory study, there are several problems here that need to be addressed. The biggest problems that need to be addressed have to do with the model's ambiguity and lack of flexibility. Also, there needs to be a way of defining values more rigorously.

The first problem with adapting Jakobson's model is that the results are somewhat ambiguous. It probably occurred to you as you read that several of my examples could have come in other categories. I, for example, placed the issue of a white instructor teaching an African-American Literature course under both the teacher's relationships to students and the teacher's relationships to context. Joseph's role as a facilitator also

appeared in two different sections of my findings. While this ambiguity may be a weakness in terms of talking about values in any sort of definitive sense, it does allow individual teachers to use this model in the way that best serves their own needs. If the ambiguity was a problem in using this communication model to discuss values, better defining the four categories might help teachers use the model more objectively.

A second weakness has to do with the model's lack of flexibility. That is, the model can only be used to examine values from the teacher's point of view. For example, I placed the conflicts among students under the teacher's relationship to the students. In reality, however, the values conflict does not include the teacher. The teacher only negotiates and mediates these conflicts. Thus, variations on this model may be needed to discuss the values of stakeholders other than teachers.

A final weakness is that if all language is persuasive, then every communication could be included as values. While there is validity to the view that all language and actions are value-laden, there needs to be a more finite way to talk about values and their role in a teacher's curriculum and pedagogical decisions.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

In spite of these weaknesses, this research did accomplish my goal of "beginning a dialogue" about ways of "systematizing values." Thus, there are several implications here. The most obvious implication of making a model of values analogous with a model of communication relates to the teaching of values. This model implies that values cannot be taught through lecture. Only through more subtle interactions and relationships can values be taught and learned. If this holds true under more rigorous research, it could have implications for the way values are inserted into the curriculum.

There are many areas that can be explored in terms of further research. Here are some questions that should be explored:

- Are there other models that better capture and confine values in a classroom?
- To what extent are most teachers aware of their value-structure as it is portrayed in the classroom?
- If a communication model does capture the nature of values, what are the implications of this for curriculum designers? Teachers? Administrators?
- To what extent do students "pick up" on the values of a teacher?

The answers to these and other questions will benefit the teaching profession.

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